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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
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June 27, 2016

Administrator Gina McCarthy
Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20460

Dear Administrator McCarthy:

The 18th Congressional District is in the midst of an ecological disaster. Nutrient-laden discharges from Lake Okeechobee coupled with local basin run-off have altered the most biodiverse estuary in America, the Indian River Lagoon. Home to more than 4,000 species of plants and animals, including dozens of threatened and endangered species, dolphins, pelicans, and one-third of America's manatee population, the Indian River Lagoon is a national treasure under assault. Due to historic El Niño-fueled rainfall, polluted discharges unusually began in the dry season and continue into the wet season. In fact, the Army Corps has discharged more freshwater into the brackish Indian River Lagoon this year than in all of 2013 when the "Lost Summer" wreaked environmental havoc on the Treasure Coast.

Last month, residents and environmental scientists began noticing blue-green algae. These blooms harm the economy and tourism, threaten wildlife, and pose a number of health risks when deemed toxic. While the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) is reporting toxicity in blue-green algae throughout the ecosystem, underfunding and lack of capacity is leaving many of the reported blooms untested, according to recent media reports. Those who call this area home are angry and frustrated. We have a right to know what is in our water.

While the State of Florida is ultimately responsible for our water quality, my constituents cannot wait. As our state leaders continue to squander voter-directed Amendment 1 conservation dollars, the need for the state's commitment to conservation and clean water could not be more urgent. Therefore, I strongly request the EPA provide technical and financial assistance to Florida DEP to increase water quality testing. Additionally, I request EPA conduct an independent assessment of the water quality in our region, including Lake Okeechobee, the St. Lucie River, and the Indian River Lagoon, as well as assessing the toxicity of large, blue-green algae blooms throughout the ecosystem. Your actions as Administrator demonstrate that you share my passion for clean water. For the health and safety of the people I represent and for the vitality of one of our nation's most important estuaries, I implore your assistance on this urgent and sadly predictable environmental disaster.

Sincerely,


Patrick E. Murphy
MEMBER OF CONGRESS